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WHAT THE HIGHER CRITICISM IS NOT.

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AT a first glance it would appear to be a much easier task to say what a thing is not than to define it accurately and minutely. The sphere of the negative is much larger than that of the positive and one can draw out of it more easily the materials for his negative answer. But this is a delusion. For a negative answer framed of materials out of the broad sphere of negations about anything would possess little value if any. The object of the negative question is not, after all, to secure a mere negative answer, but to approach as nearly as possible the positive definition. The most satisfactory way of securing this end, it must be evident at the outset, is that of distinguishing the object negatively to be defined from certain other objects with which it is liable to be confused. There are two classes of objects with which anything may be confused, and from which it is always necessary to distinguish it. These are first objects of the same kind or genus and second objects of a different kind but associated with it in the relations of cause, effect, time or space. Without trying to keep these two classes separate in our answer to the question, What the Higher Criticism is not, we will endeavor to enumerate some out of each class with which experience has proved that the Higher Criticism is being constantly confused.

1. The Higher Criticism is not the criticism of the literary characteristics of the Bible. Whether a book contains good poetry or elegant prose; whether its style is that of a master or of a novice; whether it is beautiful or indifferent, it is not the task of the Higher Criticism to pronounce. Not that it does not take cognizance of or deal with these peculiarities, but that it does not concern itself with them for themselves, but for the light they throw on a different set of questions, viz., those of the

origin, composition and value for the purposes for which the writings were intended. For this reason the common statement that the Higher Criticism is an unfortunate term and that the title "Literary Criticism" would better describe the thing meant, is not altogether true. The phrase Higher Criticism may be an unfortunate one, but the phrase Literary Criticism would be quite as objectionable. It would suggest the criticism of the biblical books as literary productions, which whether legitimate or not, is not what the Higher Criticism sets out to do. It asks not what are the beauties or defects of these productions from the æsthetic point of view, but what are the facts as to their authorship, construction, unity, time and place of composition, literary form and credibility as history or authority as ethics and religion. When it has found answers to these questions, its work is ended.

2. The Higher Criticism is not a philosophical principle or mode of viewing the Bible and its contents. There is a system of interpretation which begins with the denial of the possibility of miracles. When this system comes across the account of a supernatural event, it sets to work to explain it away. It assumes that the account is either in whole or in part the result of error or deception. When it is impossible to do this, it resorts to the denial of the genuineness or authenticity of the book in which it is found. By putting an interval of a generation or a century between the occurrence of the alleged supernatural event and the recording of it, it aims to allow for the growth of the belief in the miraculous nature of the occurrence and relieve its alleged eyewitnesses from the charge of deception or error. This is the rationalistic system of interpretation and criticism in which the philosophical assumption that miracles are impossible precedes conditions and determines the results. Sometimes these results are given out in the name of the Higher Criticism. Transparent as is this effort of the rationalist to claim the authority of a scientific method for his views to the expert, it is not easy for the inexperienced and the layman to see the distinction. He cannot too strenuously insist on the necessity of keeping apart the method of research and the rationalistic postulates

on the basis of which it is used by some. In the early days of the science of geology some atheists tried to palm off the atheistic conclusions which they drew from the discoveries of geologists as the inevitable results of geological investigation. They had carried their atheism into geology as postulates and could take from geology atheism as a result. But geology and atheism were not and never became synonymous. Thus criticism and rationalism should not be allowed to become synonymous, but as soon as possible, and as sharply as possible, distinguished from one another.

3. The Higher Criticism is not a theory of inspiration. The mistake of identifying this phrase with some theory of inspiration (generally a loose one and such as tends to annul or destroy the faith of believers in the divine origin of the Bible) arises as follows: Theories of inspiration may be built either on (1) the *statements* of the Scriptures regarding their origin and nature as as a rule of faith, or (2) on the *facts* as to the human origin of these Scriptures discovered by investigation apart from what they say of themselves. If the first of these methods be adopted exclusively the result might be one, and if the second it might be altogether different. The Higher Criticism may be taken as a guide in determining what the facts are and the second method may be adopted upon the basis of the facts thus found without reference to the claims of the Scriptures for themselves. Or, these claims may be explained away consistently with the view formulated apart from them without any modification of the view in the light thrown on the subject by them. In such a case the Higher Criticism will appear to lead to a specific view of inspiration. This has caused many to think that there is a radical theory of inspiration to be associated with the Higher Criticism and to speak of this theory as the Higher Criticism. That this is also a mistake the above analysis of the case will suffice to show.

4. The Higher Criticism is not a set of views as to the books of the Bible. It has been said above that it aims to find answers to certain questions. When those answers are found to the satisfaction of an individual critic or of a school of critics they are

not to be called the Higher Criticism. They may be true or false; this has nothing to do with naming them. They are simply results. It would be as reasonable to call the piece of work that has been fashioned by some machine by the name of the machine as to call certain views reached by it by the name of the Higher Criticism. At this point the offenders are not merely the inexperienced and laymen, but some of the most prominent men in this field. Their prominence should not condone the offense of confusing a mere tool, a mere method, with the results which they have obtained by its use. It is a serious offense. It has led to an intense dislike for the name of criticism which interferes with its lawful progress. These results, crude and unsatisfactory for the most part to others, have been put forth as "the Higher Criticism." The indiscriminating public has taken the name in good faith and reasoned that if that is Higher Criticism it would have none of it. Specifically we may name two popular forms of this mistake. (1) That which makes the Higher Criticism a series of analytic results. That the Pentateuch was composed by four or more writers; that Isaiah is not one book but at least two and perhaps five or six produced at different times between the days of the prophet of that name under Hezekiah and the latter part of the exile; that Zechariah was composed by two or more authors; to hold these views is according to this form of the error, to be a "Higher Critic." (2) The second form of this error does not limit the Higher Criticism to analytic views but to views differing from those that have been believed in the past. The opposites according to this form of it are "Tradition" and "Higher Criticism" and these are mutually exclusive. To be a Higher Critic is to deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; to assign the book of Ecclesiastes to later than Solomonic date and authorship; to ascribe the book of Daniel to the Maccabean period and in general to attach different dates to the biblical writings than those currently accepted in the Church. Whether the scholar has reached these results by patient investigation or by bare and bald conjecture it makes no difference to the one who labors under this error; as long as he holds these views regarding the books of

the Bible he is a Higher Critic. On the other hand no matter how carefully and patiently one may have labored upon an inductive basis to reach answers to the questions of criticism, if he has not come to believe that tradition is all wrong about the Bible, he is not a Higher Critic.

Is it not high time to rescue the name and with it the science and method of investigation from this confusion and abuse?